

REMEMBRANCE AND CONSCIENCE: A SACRED BOND UNITED STATES HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL MUSEUM, CENTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

**United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center For The Prevention Of Genocide
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An address by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, marking the 53rd anniversary of the United Nations Genocide Convention. The Questions and Answers session features discussions with Jerome J. Shestack, Jerry Fowler, Rabbi Irving Greenberg, Stuart E. Eizenstat, and Sara Bloomfield.

IRVING GREENBERG: I thank the leadership of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and in particular, Jerome Shestack, chair of the Committee on Conscience and Jerry Fowler, its director, for their powerful efforts to focus, deepen and expand the essential work of the Committee on Conscience. Their stature as individuals, leadership and excellence in operation is needed to enable the project to begin to play the role we all desire for it - to shape policy and save lives.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the work of their predecessors, Tom Buerghenthal and Ruth Mandel, and the important contributions of two Directors of the USHMM, Sara J. Bloomfield and her predecessor, Dr. Walter Reich, who gave and give this project strong support.

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The Relationship of Remembrance and Conscience

I. Creating a Committee on Conscience

An informed viewer seeing the makeup of the President's Commission on the Holocaust could well have predicted much of the report of the Commission which followed a year later. The chairman and the director had been active in the creation of local educational Museums dedicated to presentation of the Holocaust and to the creation of educational programs and courses in colleges and public school systems. Lay leaders like Sigmund Strochlitz, Miles Lerman and Ben Meed were active in a project called Zachor, to stimulate the creation of Museums dedicated to presentation of the Holocaust. Ben Meed, especially through WAGRO (The Warsaw Ghetto Resistance Organization), had been a major figure in annual commemorations of Yom Hashoah and Days of Remembrance for decades. The main Commission proposals of a Museum in Washington, an educational foundation, and national days of remembrance were original only in their willingness to bring the Holocaust and its lessons to the general public through a federal institution. There was, however, one 'surprise' recommendation - which could not have been predicted. The Commission recommended that "a

committee on conscience composed of distinguished moral leaders in America be appointed. This committee would receive reports of genocide (actual or potential) anywhere in the world. In the event of any outbreak, it would have access to the President, the Congress, and the public in order to alert the national conscience, influence policy makers, and stimulate worldwide action to bring such acts to a halt.”

Yad Vashem existed as a precedent for the Museum. There was no equivalent phenomenon for the Committee on Conscience. Yet from the moment the Committee concept was first placed before the Commission - my recollection is that Hyman Bookbinder brought it up, although he has modestly continued to defer the credit - strong support appeared. The Committee on Conscience proposal was adopted despite fears about the risks it posed to the Museum’s mission. Incidentally, these concerns were expressed from the very beginning also.

Despite the overwhelming consensus that remembrance was a sacred mission, despite the powerful leadership of survivors who were struggling to insure that their own families and communities would not be forgotten, the emotional dynamic of the Commission always had a strong focus on “never again.” The urgent effort to remember was driven not by motivation to blame the world for having been silent, and not even by the urge to cling to the memory of the precious victims who were so swiftly and totally destroyed that their remembrance was at risk. The stronger drive was the grim determination to prevent such events from happening again. To quote the Commission’s report: “of all the issues addressed by the Commission, none was as perplexing or urgent as the need to insure that such a totally inhuman assault as the Holocaust -- or any partial version thereof - never recurs.”

The Commission was quite aware that such a total genocide was so extreme as to be inherently less likely to be repeated. It was fully prepared to apply the Holocaust lesson to situations that were not as extreme. Moreover, there were few illusions as to how much had been accomplished morally by the existing bank of memory. It was not clear that the world was morally spurred sufficiently by Holocaust remembrance to really force governments to act to stop the recurrence of genocide. The Commission members saw the evidence (in later decades strengthened by policy failures in Rwanda, Bosnia etc.) that the world did not yet care enough to intervene when other political considerations (including unwillingness to take casualties) interfered with the desire to stop genocide. I quote: “the Commission was burdened by the knowledge that 35 years of post Holocaust history testified to how little has been learned.” However, it insisted “only a conscious, concerted attempt to learn from past errors can prevent recurrence to any racial, religious, ethnic or national group.” It concluded that avoiding this issue would be a betrayal. “A memorial unresponsive to the future would also violate the memory of the past.”

The Commission felt at that time that the greatest danger of recurrence lay in the world’s not knowing about new genocides. “In the years following the Holocaust, Americans repeatedly explained: ‘we didn’t know. We didn’t understand the magnitude of the problem. If only we had known, something would have been done’.” The Commission speculated that “open hearings could be instituted in the event of major offenses against peoples, so that early reports of atrocities would not be suppressed, as they were between 1941 and 1943.” “Trusting in the moral responsiveness of the American people and other peoples throughout the world, the Commission feels that the task now is to combat silence and ignorance....” Here - if you will permit a personal

aside - I would like to confess a certain dissatisfaction which I came to feel after we adopted the name, the Committee on Conscience, but I never felt free to say this publicly, lest it be heard as a criticism of the project.

The image of a “Committee on Conscience” drew on a certain pessimism about the future. The world would not listen; even if it heard about new mass murder the world would not change its policy. Thus, the reference to conscience summons up the image of the one moral person speaking in the face of a world full of hard hearts and ethical indifference. To me, it always summoned up the classic Elie Wiesel story of the righteous person who stands outside picketing or protesting while inside the evil goes on and the bystanders dismiss the protest with scorn. The demonstrator is challenged. Foolish man, why do you picket when you see that no one listens? He answers: I protest so that at least I do not give in to the temptation to go inside and join the indifferent.

This fear of a world looking away reflected the limited impact and spread of Holocaust consciousness in the decades following World War II. In fact, the United States, in particular, was on the cusp of a massive expansion of Holocaust awareness and sensitivity to the failures that made the Shoah possible. Commission members and early pioneers of Holocaust consciousness found that they personally had been transformed by coming to grips with the Shoah. To them it was self-evident that one could not go on living the same way after the Holocaust as before. Nor could public political policy be unaffected. Yet not a lot of people shared this axiom. Personally, I think it was because the American people had not yet heard the story, the record, and the implications of the Holocaust. Of course, this Museum was to make a major contribution to informing the public; the shift in awareness that undercut the idea that the world would not want to hear.

If you will permit a touch of humor in such a sober topic, personally, I would call it the Committee That You Can’t Live After As You Did Before or the Committee to Save Lives or The Death Into Life project - for that, as I shall argue, is what we are really about - to harness memory to fight for life.

It turned out that the Commission underestimated the media. In the decades since the report, genocide has indeed recurred but the massacres were covered, indeed exhaustively portrayed through television and the mass media. Moreover, there was a real sense of failure and self-criticism on the part of the media that had failed to cover the story of the Holocaust. In its 150th Anniversary Special Edition celebrating its accomplishments, the New York Times focused overwhelmingly on only one failure, i.e. that it had not brought together the significance and the breadth of the Nazi assault on the Jews nor given it the front page coverage that might have drawn the proper attention of the world to this catastrophe.

The real problem is that political interests and foreign policy considerations neutralized the impact of policy of the moral factor of “never again” even when governments know that genocide is coming. Not that the Commission had the illusion that the mission would automatically succeed or that that world was ready for the Committee on Conscience. Its report referred openly to the State Department blocking Commission Chairman Elie Wiesel’s attempts to witness firsthand the massive human rights violations reported in Argentina. But it argued

that, “if evil cannot be totally eliminated, it may at least be alleviated.” Members of the Commission believed that even a failed intervention would be more constructive than to stand idly by when in the future (as was likely) the blood of some community would again be spilled in genocidal fashion.

II. Objections to a Committee on Conscience

As it turned out, the creation of the Museum was an enormous task. Many obstacles, internal and external, had to be overcome to create it. Planning took more than a decade and the Museum was not opened until 1993. Yet the massive task of articulating a vision, developing a narrative, creating and setting up the exhibition and raising hundreds of millions of dollars proved to be more easily done than the creation of a Committee on Conscience. The Committee did not actually go into operation until 1995. The resistance and the reservations came from three primary sources. One was the State Department and other policy makers throughout the Federal government. These groups feared setting up a body which was invited by legislation to offer independent critique of American foreign policy, particularly in a matter of such high stakes and high tension as potential genocide. One fear expressed was that government policy would be undercut and its credibility (or lack of credibility) exposed by a body whose prestige would be undergirded by official government sponsorship. The other fear was that by its very nature a Committee on Conscience would have a built-in tendency toward excessive moralism and toward giving greater weight to moral factors than was prudent or pragmatically possible in American foreign policy. Government figures were concerned that the Committee would consist of amateurs who would be easily suckered into questionable policy judgments and adventures.

The second set of reservations reflected the concerns of those who were the most intensely committed to Holocaust remembrance; not a few of them were survivors. Their primary fear was that the Committee on Conscience, with all good intentions, would dilute and possibly divert the Museum’s mission. Many considered the Holocaust so terrifying and horrific that any application by analogy to lesser events would represent a cheapening of the event that could undercut the awe with which the Shoah should be approached. In the opinion of others, the Holocaust was such an extreme event that any application of Shoah memory to other political events was ipso facto wrong. Still others expressed the fear that the Committee would extend its mission and become involved in lesser human rights issues and violations. They feared a slippery slope. The Committee would start with warnings against genocide; then deal with crimes against humanity; then it would take up human rights in general. Then - and most feared - was the danger of a final step to trivialization. As Holocaust consciousness spread, this danger appeared not to be inconsiderable. Thus, activists complaining about poor tests and educational results amongst the urban poor spoke of “cultural genocide” and even of a “cultural Holocaust.” Individual survivors feared that the thrust toward trivialization was getting stronger and could easily overtake the Museum’s work.

Among the Commission members, another concern was expressed. Many causes in human rights around the world were particularly fashionable on the left wing of politics. One residue of the anti-Vietnam war movement was that there was spreading animus toward American policy. Too often the tendency led to blaming America for the sins of the world. Sometimes critics exaggerated America’s human rights failures deeming them morally equivalent or worse than

radical dictatorship misbehaviors. To some, the nightmare was a Committee on Conscience out of control using the memory of the Holocaust to damage the country which had done so much to take in the survivors for a new life. Others feared that the bipartisan good will which provided the Museum with essential support might be undercut by a left-right split over human rights.

Also from 1967 on, Israel was less and less fashionable among people on the radical left. Another nightmare scenario was that a decade or two later the United States Holocaust Memorial Council could be taken over by a majority from that trendy left who then might criticize or denounce Israel, thus weakening its capacity to resist genocide. The prospect of misuse of the memory of the Holocaust turned against Israel, the classical focus of new life and dignity for a large number of survivors, was deeply disturbing.

A third group was critical of the Committee on Conscience from the beginning: I would describe them as universalists who felt that Holocaust memory could not carry such a policy burden. Some in the group focused on the difficulty or unlikelihood of developing a specific policy based on such a sweeping and distinctive tragedy such as the Holocaust. In his sensitive study of the history of the Museum, *Preserving Memory*, Edward Linenthal expressed such reservations. Acknowledging the hope, as Elie Wiesel put it, that “whoever enters the subject is purified by it...is humanized by it,” Linenthal countered that “the issues of Holocaust memory, however, are more complex.” Linenthal described American confusion about what to do in Bosnia in the face of the ethnic cleansing occurring just as the Museum was being publicly dedicated. He pointed to the policy differences over Bosnia and Kosovo as proof that far from providing a “clear road map for policy decision,” Holocaust memory “was an unwelcome burden for the Bush and Clinton administrations” (p.266). To Linenthal, the problem was that no matter how transformative an event is, the “memory of that event is not necessarily equally transformative” (ibid, 267). Linenthal missed the point; the Commission was counting on the educational role of the Museum and the spread of Holocaust consciousness to raise public commitment to the point where it would begin to affect policy.

Some of the universalists felt that the influence of the spread of Holocaust consciousness was in itself not good; they were unhappy or uncomfortable with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum being a federal institution. Take the example of Professor Peter Novick in his book, *The Holocaust in American Life*. To simplify a book with a complex argument, Novick is convinced that the impact of intensified Holocaust consciousness in American Jewry has been morally pernicious. The brutal shock of encountering the killing and degradation of European Jews has corrupted American Jewry. It is Novick’s contention that the American Jewish community turned inward, shifting from an erstwhile universalist, humane concern for all humanity and especially the weak, toward a self-centered parochialism concerned primarily for Israeli and for (selfish) Jewish survival. In Novick’s view, this development, in turn, led to the vice of neo-conservative thought, with socially conservative Jews turning their backs on the victims of racism, unconstrained capitalism, etc.

Nothing refuted this claim of Holocaust inspired recidivism into tribalism and chauvinism more than the attempt to apply Holocaust awareness to the mission of preventing genocide anywhere in the world. Unable to deny that such applications were expressed by activists in the cause of Holocaust memory and by the very creation of the Committee on Conscience mechanism,

Novick set out to prove that the Holocaust could not generate a higher level of moral responsibility. In his view invoking the event would more likely weaken the public's commitment. He argued that other crimes are inherently "lesser" and therefore making comparisons to the Holocaust might encourage people to be complacent about smaller evils. Novick cited the confusion as to proper American response to the Bosnian atrocities (including a critique of those who argued that excessive intervention in foreign situations led to American moral failures) to argue that there was no hope that the Holocaust could generate a more responsible foreign policy.

The conclusion of the President's Commission (and of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum when it finally rolled out the Committee on Conscience) was, first and foremost, to focus on genocide. There would be no dealing with human rights in the broader sense because other groups might be better equipped to handle them. More importantly, such activities could lead to a departure from the purity of the mission of the Museum. On the other hand, preventing the risk of genocide was worth the candle. "The Commission ... knows well the potential for the politicization of a Committee on Conscience, but the risks are worth taking if such a body can provide maximal exposure for dangerous developments, raising, in one scholar's words, an 'institutional scream' to alert the conscience of the world and to spark public outcry."

The Commission (and the Museum) believed that the focus on genocide would in itself be a statement of the seriousness and solemnity of the Holocaust event. The Holocaust was genocide raised to a higher level of intensity by the total nature of the operation, i.e. by the decision to destroy an entire people wherever it was located, to smash its values and culture and to degrade its members before they were killed. Nevertheless it was a genocide. Genocide is so extreme a step that in the end there should only be one policy option, i.e. to stop genocide. (Obviously this did not preclude the possibility that there would be differences about the specific policies needed for successful intervention in a particular place). Genocide was so inherently outrageous that one could feel safe in applying the Holocaust as a goad toward some response or acts of prevention.

The Commission (and the Museum) recognized that there was an educational process going on. "Trusting in the moral responsiveness of the American people and other peoples throughout the world," the Museum was banking on a longer-term movement toward establishing international norms against genocide. This process started with Raphael Lemkin's response to Nazism by coining the very term genocide and focusing the world on this phenomenon and continued as people became more and more aware of the ugliness and destructiveness of this mass murder. The Commission (and the Museum's leaders) understood that the creation of the Committee increased risk of stimulating moralism rather than morality and unleashing some amateurs to intervene in foreign policy. Nevertheless even such abuses would be reflective of the movement toward greater sensitivity to human dignity and human rights considerations in foreign policy.

Of course this heightened receptivity was truer of Democratic administrations under Presidents Carter and Clinton than it was of Republican administrations. Presidents Reagan and Bush's policy planners included more people who believed that there was a counter-moral impact from interventions that were not well thought through. But the majority were convinced that this party difference would not turn into partisan politics nor place the Museum in one or the other political parties' orbit. Rather, the spread of Holocaust consciousness and the growth in awareness of the

moral failures of that decade continued to raise expectations that something would be done in today's world. Thus, the context for the Committee on Conscience's work would improve even if it was not yet efficacious enough to totally transform government policy.

In the same way the Commission (and later the Museum leadership) believed that the danger of mission dilution was exaggerated. To place the Holocaust in a category of such absolute status as to preclude applying its record to other situations would be to turn it into an unintelligible surd that was of no relevance to the world. The classic articulator of the mystery and incomprehensibility of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel, made clear that he was speaking on the level of metaphysics and poetry, in this judgment. This insight was fully compatible with taking the Holocaust seriously and applying some of its implications to moral crises and to preventing genocide at another level. Thus, the leadership was prepared to depend on the good judgment of the Committee on Conscience not to run away with the mandate and allow the Museum's mission to be diluted or cheapened in the process. The precisely limited application (to prevent genocide only) would be able to save lives.

Similarly the universalists' objections were challenged. What if there were no one clear policy dictated by reflection on the Holocaust? The debate over what was the right policy, the raising of the alarm to arouse the attention of the public would in itself be a contribution affecting the parameters of policy and encouraging government intervention when needed. It would be naïve to refrain from the attempt to affect policy just because important weight was still being given to economic, political or foreign alliance considerations in government decision making (rather than weighing only pure morality).

All three critiques - from the policy makers who feared unequivocal policy recommendations they could not agree to, to universalists who feared there would be no unequivocal policy recommendations, and to the particularists who feared policies that would lead to dilution - had one methodological principle in common. They assumed "all or nothing," i.e. that in applying the lessons of the Shoah, either the highest moral standard should be met, if not, then the Holocaust should not be invoked at all. But this moral polarization is not helpful. Primo Levi pointed out in his classic *Survival in Auschwitz* that the key to maintaining morality in the camps was the ability to give up absolute categories and to live by partial moral judgments. If prisoners entered the camp and tried to act identically with their previous standard in civilian life, this was impossible. They were more likely to run afoul of the system, and to be crushed by it. If a prisoner gave in totally and tried to live by the law of the jungle, then the prisoner ran the risk of identifying with the masters - which increased the likelihood of self destructiveness. Such behavior would turn all the prisoners against all others which further hurt the chances of survival. Levi credited the ability to break but not to yield, to live by partial moral standards and to operate in that context as significantly raising the chance of physical and moral survival. (Levi also pointed out that there was a powerful element of destructiveness and randomness that overrode many prisoners' adaptations and killed them.) Nevertheless the ability to work within limited moral parameters, the best under the circumstances, was one of the keys to the moral and physical survival.

Let me apply this paradigm: attempts to apply and to learn the lessons of the Shoah should be guided equally by the realism of the possible rather than prevented by the idealism of the

impossible. The Committee on Conscience was launched with a mission to keep a primary focus on genocide and to alert the world through preliminary findings of watch and warning about the possibility of emerging genocide. In a particular situation of incipient genocide, if no one policy intervention can establish itself in the consensus policy then this will reduce the chances of influencing the objective of the policy. Still, clarification of the issues and debate in themselves strengthen the influence of moral considerations. The net outcome of arousing the public and reaching out to policy maker works toward a longer term commitment to give weight to the urgency of preventing a genocide (in memory of the Holocaust) alongside the prudential considerations or realpolitik that typically dominate national foreign policy. There is no reason for cynicism if in fact this value of “never again” cannot in itself transform the world at once. Religion has been trying for thousands of years to establish higher norms in personal as well as communal life; the world is not yet perfected. Still, there have been improvements - typically attained one step at a time - which have materially made society more responsible for the weak and the poor. Cultures have been inspired to show more concern for the treatment of the stranger and the outsider.

The Commission believed that Americans were open to giving greater weight to moral consideration (and particularly to stopping the moral scandal of genocide) in light of the shame at the failure to act during the Holocaust. It also believed that more policy makers were prepared to incorporate this revulsion at past failures into future policy formulation. Even more policymakers could be brought along - particularly as consciousness of the Holocaust grew. In this, the Commission members and the Council trusted their own experience. Those who cared most deeply about the Holocaust were more likely to support strong policy interventions to prevent genocide. The dangers of the world being indifferent in the face of actual genocide and of people not trying to block genocide were far more serious than the dangers of disagreeing over policy recommendations or of diluting the mission.

III. A Philosophy of the Relationship of Remembrance and Conscience

In weighing the appropriate role of conscience and intervention to stop genocide in this institution, one should not judge by tactical considerations only. There is a fundamental principle that begs for consideration. Is remembering in itself fulfillment of our responsibility to the victims? Is the act of memory so human that it is self-validating and needs no further application to life to be justified or relevant? Would victims of the Holocaust themselves ask us to remember as a sufficient way of honoring their suffering and lives?

Here I would like to draw some guidance from the culture of those Jews who lived in the world that was destroyed. I draw my models from that culture because it is the one that I know best. Undoubtedly the cultures of other victims remembered in this Museum also have guidelines that can help us answer the question. I call on scholars of those traditions to involve themselves and bring light to our question from those heritages.

As the Holocaust unfolded, more and more people grasped that henceforth, daily personal existence involved a continual struggle for and human dignity and against death and degradation. It also became clear that the Nazis sought to cover up their crimes and to erase the memory of those they had destroyed. In turn, courageous souls realized that recording the crimes and

remembering the lives was a way of resisting the process of destruction, degradation and attempted oblivion. Then they undertook the task and risk of collecting and registering this record. Did these heroes think that securing memory alone was sufficient?

Let me cite three examples from the Warsaw Ghetto. One was the Oneg Shabbat circle initiated by Emanuel Ringelblum, the Jewish historian, joined by Rabbi Shimon Huberband and others. The project sought to record Jewish life going on in the ghetto and as much of the crime (and the struggle against it) as could be safely annotated. The project also extended out to write the history of Jews in Poland and other matters that would serve as benchmark for the lives of future generations. As it turned out, the speed of the crushing catastrophe overtook the project and prevented completion of the more ambitious histories. Still the leaders of Oneg Shabbat made clear that they sought not only to remember and preserve the record of Jewish life but also to create a basis of understanding to guide future Jewish behavior. Similarly, the group that organized the armed revolt in the Warsaw ghetto knew that its members would likely die. But Mordechai Anielewicz and others made clear that their goal was not only to uphold Jewish honor. They hoped that Jews would remember that they had fought and upheld their dignity. They also dreamed and organized so that a future Jewish people would draw the lessons, arm themselves and protect Jewish life in a new way. Thus, life after would be changed.

Finally, I would point to the doctors project. As starvation spread in the Warsaw Ghetto, a group of doctors recognized that it would be impossible to stop this process of dying. The extremely limited food which the Germans provided was utterly inadequate to sustain the Jewish population. Moreover, the ghetto was cut off. Smuggling could not be carried on at the scale needed for adequate food supplies. Neither money supply nor property resources were adequate to maintain the ghetto at some livable level. Recognizing that they could not stop the process, the doctors decided to do a study - at great personal cost and risk - of the impact of starvation on the human body. Such an extensive study on the impact of hunger on human physiology, health and behavior could never be done in a civil society, as it would violate all ethical standards. However, now that starvation was being inflicted on the Jews willy-nilly, then the doctors could turn the study of the medical effects into a force for life saving. As Charles Roland put it: "They had no illusion that the research would allow them or their patients to survive. Rather, it was research of the purest kind, intended to advance human knowledge" (Roland, p.5). If they could not prevent the deaths, then at least let the medical record be available to save lives afterwards.

Early in the destruction process, the Jewish community throughout Europe became aware of the need to assure that the memory would be preserved. The phrase most widely used was *zachor*: remember. *Zachor* is a classic term in Hebrew tradition and religion. If one looks at the Biblical record, *zachor*/remember is the core of Jewish religion. The memory of the exodus supplied the key religious paradigm for Israelite religion. The event validated the promise that God had once (and would again) redeemed the Jewish people. Memory of exodus followed by application of its lessons became the key ethical model designed to transform behavior. Thus, Israel should follow God's ways, love God and be kind in response to this memory (Deuteronomy 10:12 - 22; 11:1-9). Hebrew slaves became servants instead of slaves, allowed to go free after six years, out of memory of the exodus (Leviticus 25:39-55). The stranger was not to be oppressed out of the memory of being strangers in Egypt (Exodus 23:9). Even acting justly in business, laws of honest weights and measures, requirements of helping the poor and taking care of the widow and

orphan were validated as responses evoked by the memory of the Exodus. The rituals - from Passover's paschal lamb to the thrice-annual pilgrimages, from tzitzit (sacred fringes) to Shabbat to first fruits - were behavioral responses to the memory of the exodus redemption. The point is that memory was not a sufficient value; it was rather a primary paradigm leading to obligations and actions, both ethical and ritual.

There is an even more direct source for the call/commandment zachor; it was to remember the way out of Egypt. There the people of Amalek inflicted a crushing and devastating defeat on the Israelite ex-slaves and in particular on the women, children, and the weak. Zachor remember what Amalek did to you, became a central commandment of Jewish historical memory. Zachor became a very influential paradigm, symbolizing the need to fight evil and would be genocide. The commandment called for unqualified war and destruction of Amalek. One can quarrel with the morality of the commandment but the lesson is clear. The paradigm "to remember" is best expressed in action to destroy or defeat what would be, future genocidal behavior.

IV. Remembrance and Testimony for Life

On the walls of the Museum is the classic Biblical phrase "You are my witnesses (sayeth the Lord)." The obvious meaning of the phrase evokes Dwight Eisenhower's comments - also found on the walls of the Museum - that he made certain to visit the camps first hand and see for himself. He ordered his soldiers to do likewise - lest there come some future date when these stories would be dismissed as atrocity propaganda, as happened after World War I. But there is a deeper meaning to the role of witness. The Museum offers a narrative of the suffering, the story of that which we remember from the Holocaust. Its public exhibition is therefore not a neutral act of recording history, but an act of active testimony. But what is the witness?

The Nazi assault sought to destroy Jewish religion, not just Jewish existence. Jewish religion is organized around a witness for life. The Bible teaches the eventual triumph of life. The central Jewish narratives of creation and redemption tell that this world was created by God, the ultimate ground and source of life; it was intended to be filled with life. Some day the world will be reconstituted so that it sustains the fullness of dignity of human life, i.e., the infinite value, the equality and uniqueness of all humans. To do justice to these intrinsic dignities of the human being, hunger, poverty, war, degradation and injustice must and will be overcome. This is the messianic promise of redemption, taken up by Christianity and Islam later. Until the final perfection, the individual is called upon to choose life and honor the dignity of life in all that he/she does. If the core culture witnesses for life, for its dignity, and its ultimate victory, then the Shoah constitutes a massive counter testimony. The Holocaust record witnesses to the power of death, the ability to inflict degradation and suffering, the cheapening of value and of human life. Memory then cannot be a neutral activity. Memory is not a mechanical recording process, it is a witness which seeks to fight for life. To remember is an attempt to resume the fight on the side of life now that the victims are no longer in a position to witness. Therefore, the natural direction of memory is to be harnessed in the fight for life.

Another powerful expression of the linkage to witness and life in Jewish tradition is found in the prayer for the dead, The Kaddish. The prayer does not in fact recall the dead, rather The Kaddish prayers interpret existence as a setting wherein humans are called to establish God's kingdom.

God's kingdom is the earth when life has won out, when equality, goodness and peace reign everywhere. This makes God's name great, i.e. the Divine is present, credible and convincing. God's name is established by creating life in circumstances which sustain the fullness of human dignity, including equal justice and good living conditions. "[When] they shall do no evil nor harm throughout my holy mountain, then the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as the water fills the sea" (Isaiah 11:10). When death wins out, when injustice, crime and evil triumph, then God's name is reduced and God's kingdom shrinks.

The Kaddish, the response to death, connects the living to the person who has died, not for the sake of memory alone, but to inspire in the one who speaks the words, the commitment to take the place of the dead. The death of this person, particularly now in this yet unredeemed world, would seem to prove that evil is too strong to be overcome and that the final word goes to death. But then someone who is a family member - or one who loved that lost one - stands up and gives witness. The death of this person is not the end. I still believe in the dream lived by past generations. That broken but unbowed faith is expressed in this prayer. This is a prayer that life will win out and that the world will be brought to peace and to the fullness of human dignity. The one who prays The Kaddish prayer states that with my life I carry on the task of filling the world with life and assuring the triumph of life. Death is not the closure of the dream, for someone (that is, I) lives on and will carry on this unfinished task. May God's name be restored to greatness and God's kingdom be established now in the lifetime of those who hear these words. In Jewish tradition, remembrance is profoundly linked to redemption; it does not suffice only to remember.

The Museum's Committee on Conscience is intended to be the expression of a memory that is committed to improving the world. Its function is to reassert the witness of those who were killed and of those who went before us that life is meaningful and that the world will yet be redeemed. Here again, remembrance and redemption, memory of suffering and commitment to preventing it from happening again are bound together indissolubly. It is interesting to note that a number of studies have shown that second generation children of survivors are particularly and disproportionately involved in areas of human services, social work, etc. It would appear that the message of survivors - sometimes communicated openly and often silently and without words - is that the power of memory or past suffering is to be translated into motivation to increase life, to reduce suffering, to redeem the world and its human inhabitants. Thus, memory comes not alone but in the service of life; it is enlisted in the battle of protecting life against the onslaught of death-dealing evil.

Jewish history has been marked by the appearance of Messianic movements - that is, major efforts to bring the final perfection -- particularly in generations that follow events of great destruction. It may seem strange that a generation that witnessed devastating triumphs for evil would even dream of, let alone try to act out, the ultimate victory of the good and of life itself. However, this is the logic of testimony. The recent successful destruction is a powerful setback for the forces of good; this creates a crisis in the witness. The weight of the evidence of death is so great that it threatens to crush the ability to testify on the side of life for the victory of the good. To offset this historical tilt toward death, there is a need not merely for testimony, but for a great victory for life. Only such a breakthrough can correct the deeply skewed moral balance and to restore the credibility of the witness for life. As it were, there is a need for major victories of life saving to neutralize the otherwise irrefutable witness of the power of evil and the successful

destruction of so many lives. In the generation after the Holocaust, with its evidence that evil has unlimited power and that human life can be degraded to the limit, it becomes imperative that society organize to reassert the value of life and win victories for life saving. Organizing to stop genocide is a fundamental recognition of the scope of death in the Holocaust. This action honors memory by turning it into a force for asserting life.

Of course, however noble the motivation, the desire to stop genocide does not exempt us from reality, from the hard work that is needed to check the forces of evil. Thus, once established, the Committee on Conscience drew up a policy that recognized that good intentions are not enough. The Holocaust Memorial Museum is trying to build a structure which can make findings, engage the media and a broad range of government and civic officials over time. We seek to create an apparatus which can cumulatively build up awareness of the threat of genocide. The nobility of the task must be matched by absolute dedication to the detailed, step-by-step, pragmatic and effective process of actually helping people and stopping mass murder. Thus, ideal ends can best be served by proximate means backed by total dedication to connect memory and conscience. Memory supplies the energy and the power to conscience to save lives. There could be no more appropriate or profound way of honoring the victims than by saving lives in their memory.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

JERRY FOWLER: We have a little time, actually, for questions. We've put microphones at the base of each aisle, so if people have questions or wanted to interact a little bit with Rabbi Greenberg this would be the time. And we can take about 15 minutes, 20 minutes, to do this, and then we have the reception upstairs.

RABBI GREENBERG: The first question is always the hardest. No one likes to start.

QUESTION: Does the world remember?

JERRY FOWLER: The question is does the world remember?

RABBI GREENBERG: Obviously not enough because in fact, as we all are quite aware, there have been genocides in this decade that were not stopped. So the answer to your question, I believe, is that memory continues to spread.

I think we've had remarkable breakthroughs in this decade toward the spread of memory but it has not yet reached the level of intensity where it is enough of a factor to assure the proper intervention, which brings me back to the Committee on Conscience.

In other words we see this as another mechanism to make sure that as the memory spreads it is converted into a focus on specific actions to prevent genocide and so it's a combination of both tasks at once.

I will say again what I said during the talk, that, however, the people that are most powerfully touched by memory have been the most willing to transform or to change policy accordingly and therefore that seems to be a measure of the test.

So if you want a quick indicator if you have a canary in the coal mine as to whether the task of memory is succeeding this would be it. To the extent that potential genocide arouses a greater attention and in fact forces governments to act would be a measure of how successful you have been in spreading the memory and then focusing it.

QUESTION: Isn't it a good cause?

RABBI GREENBERG: Yes, we would certainly assert that obviously the Museum is one of many forces that have tried to spread the memory. There's a famous Hasidic story of the two pockets. In one pocket you carry a thing that says, "I am dust and ashes," and in the other pocket you carry something that says, "For my sake the world is created." These are two famous Hasidic passages.

In one pocket we have to say that millions now, an extraordinarily high percentage of the American public, for example, is not only aware of the Holocaust but believes it should be taught and further expanded in the schools and so on.

In the other pocket we have to say that the truth is that it has not been sufficient to change the system yet and therefore this is the measure of how much further we have to go.

QUESTION: I'd like to raise a question. Genocide, of course, is a prime and the ultimate example of disregard for human life, disrespect for it, and denigration of human life.

How do you relate the dangers of genocide and the genocides that have occurred to the current fight against terrorism?

RABBI GREENBERG: Let me just make one side comment here which is we're not just talking of theories, too. In the last 30 or 40 years I believe there was a serious prospect that had Israel lost any of its wars that we would have seen a genocide of its people.

It's not an accident, I believe, that this fact was reflected in a culture where it still has the widest degree of denial of Holocaust or of a willingness to dismiss its dimensions and so on.

In other words during the period of the peak of communist power, again, as a nation and as a group it was prepared to support and encourage this possibility. I mean, Russia has several times restored Arab military power after they failed to carry out what would have been a genocidal war.

I believe it was directly reflected in the communists' inability to come to grips with the Holocaust, that is to say, the denial of Jewish distinctiveness, the unwillingness to concede that there was responsibility here that was more than just fascist or capitalist and so on. So I believe there's a direct correlation between openness to genocide and a culture's ability to confront the Holocaust.

Now you're asking me to apply the same question to the question of terrorism. I don't want to claim that terrorism is the equivalent of the Holocaust, and I don't want to claim that terrorism

would be stopped by such consciousness but I think the issues are very parallel. I mean it in the following way. The hatred, the other-ing of the other, the ability to consider their lives unimportant or to be cheaply expended for a good cause, and you have to keep in mind that Nazism had also great religious fervor. Hitler's dream was national socialism to perfect the world. It was a powerful force in SS ideology.

That same kind of thinking, that for a higher cause I can destroy and sacrifice human life, I think has been a major factor in terrorist operation and is a major factor in their ability to carry out terrorist actions.

Secondly, I think it's also part of this. There is, I believe, a struggle of life and death or between life and death which I referred to all evening which I think goes on as culture. I'm sure many of you were struck by it if you read the letter that was left over by Mohammed Atta that was found in his car, the letter that almost one might say a kind of last testament, said to in this case a suicide bomber, a very powerful religious theme, and the central theme really was that this life, the life you and I live, is trivial and it's dirty and it's ugly, unimportant, compromised, but that within a few hours you'd be ready to reach this life of purity in a different world, not in this world.

So it was a kind of hatred of this life that runs through that letter and a kind of a fascination with the perfect, untouched-by-human-hands life that one would live in the next world. So by just going through this gesture, by going through with this action, one would move from this hateful, unworthy life to the pure life of purity. But I believe it's a fascination with death that's really implicit in this because this life is compromised and this life is equivocal and full of all kinds of dirty agreements so one has to seek out that purity and, of course, in so doing one not only renounces this life but takes the lives of many others with you.

I think Nazism had the same struggle, too. It was a search for purity that hates real life and this is one of the great struggles that we all go through, the ability to affirm this life and to come to grips with it and to experience its beauty and its power but in its limits, in its failures, in its brokenness is the antithesis.

Now, what the Holocaust represents is absolute kind of purity of ideal that becomes the enemy of life and falls in love with death which has a purity and a finality. Martyrdom has a long history of fascinating appeal in the Jewish tradition. It's interesting. The rabbis turned against messianism or tried to repress it or limit it because they felt that in this desire for breakthroughs they were afraid would come a kind of a fascination with purity which leads to martyrdom and self-sacrifice but then you wipe away this life.

So in martyrdom is some very noble things but pushed a little further it becomes the enemy of life and falls in love with death. And I was very struck, and I'm sure many of you saw it in the papers that two or three days after the Towers tragedy and catastrophe they had this interview on television with the spokesman for Al Qaeda. And I don't remember the exact language. I didn't bring it with me. I should have. But he said roughly like this, he said I want to warn the Americans that they can have no security, no peace, because we're coming after them. And he

said Americans love life and we have thousands of people who love death and are prepared to make your life in effect impossible, miserable.

I forget the exact language but the heart of what he captured without maybe even being aware of it is that he had thousands of people who had fallen in love with this purity, which is the purity of death and not of life, and were prepared to sacrifice the lives of countless others for them. And I believe this is the same process that we're fighting and struggling with over learning the lessons of the Holocaust.

To master the purity of ideology and control it, to break it up, that's why I keep saying pluralism is one of the greatest and important lessons that flow from dealing with the aftermath of the Holocaust because we now understand that pure death-dealing, the kind that was possible there, is only possible when you override all limits and there are no powers to check.

And I believe that that is what terrorism constitutes, a kind of overriding of all limitations and desire to break through for your victory by stopping at nothing, be it your own death or the death of others.

JERRY SHESTACK: On another note there is obviously no restitution for genocide or an event like the Holocaust, but yet there have been efforts to bring perhaps some measure of restitution or solace to the survivors of the Holocaust.

And one of the heroes of that movement is in the audience today, Ambassador Stu Eizenstat, who really was the animator and the eminence gris and the activator of the whole reparations movement involving Holocaust survivors. Stu, is there any comment you would like to make?

MR. EIZENSTAT: I wanted to test a proposition which I don't assert as fact but as more of an assertion that I'd like you to reply to or agree with or comment on.

If we look at our lifetime in terms of the major genocides that have occurred, the Holocaust, Rwanda, Cambodia, and then Kosovo and Bosnia, in three of those four, that is, the Holocaust, Rwanda, and Cambodia, there was no external intervention at all and they basically went their course, perhaps two million people in Cambodia. Jerry Fowler mentioned today that 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda, 75 percent of the population, and, of course, the Jewish genocide, the Holocaust itself.

The only instance in which there was an intervention by the outside world, and that belatedly, was by NATO in Bosnia and then in Kosovo, the ethnic cleansing, and it seems to me that there may be two points to make here and this is what I'd like you to comment on.

One is that in at least the three where there was no intervention there was no constituency in any country that cared enough to pressure governments to act. The Jews didn't do so. The Jewish community didn't do so during World War II for reasons which can be debated. There was no constituency for the Cambodians. And the African American community really did not bring pressure on the government during the Rwanda-Burundi issue until very late in the game.

In the one instance in which there was an intervention, that is, the Kosovo- Bosnia situation, one could also argue that there was no domestic constituency, but there was something that didn't exist in the other three, and that is it happened in Europe but it happened during an era of television and that the ethnic cleansing became so perverse and was communicated by CNN and other media that it almost forced policy makers to do something, number one.

Number two, having worked with Secretary Albright, given her own history, having fled Europe, and her own alertness to the Holocaust, she brought a great deal of pressure on our own government and on our own President to act. But I think that without her we still might not have done so but clearly without television that wouldn't have occurred. And there was no television in Cambodia, there was no television except at the very end in Rwanda, and there was certainly obviously no television to bring it to people's attention.

So in going back to the first question that was asked about does the world know, yes, the world knows about the Holocaust but one wonders if there is a constituency absent what the media may itself bring that will put enough pressure on governments to intervene.

And that gets back, actually, to the Committee on Conscience because we can help create that constituency and elevate it as has been done by the warning in Sudan and so forth. But I wonder if you would perhaps comment on that and whether even, knowing the Holocaust as it is, there is a sufficient constituency to act so that governments will be occasioned to do so?

One last point, and that is with respect to Cambodia and Rwanda both are very isolated countries and instances. It would be very difficult, having worked with presidents, for the President of the United States to commit military resources to isolated countries even under the most extenuating circumstance. Again, a distinction with Kosovo. It was on the European continent. NATO was there. There was a question after the Cold War, does NATO have any future, and it was almost embarrassed into action to show that it still had some relevance.

RABBI GREENBERG: Incidentally, before I answer the question, Jerry, since you were gracious and correct and accurate in describing Stu Eizenstat's enormous contribution to the beginning of restitution and reparation I want to also acknowledge his unique, I believe, central role in making this Museum possible when he served as domestic advisor to the chief of staff in that area for President Carter. So we owe you a lot and this is one of them.

JERRY SHESTACK: I should add that the best person here to answer the question that Stu raised is Stu Eizenstat.

RABBI GREENBERG: I welcome Jerry's and Stu's comment, too. I'll just say again that I think you're drawing attention to the important mechanisms that operate from theoretical considerations into real policies. Constituencies make enormous difference, no question about it, and therefore again my argument is that what you have shown us is the way in which the Committee can function effectively.

It can't just think in general terms. It has to seek to focus and find those constituencies and involve them in this process of concern to fight genocide. I personally think that even the failures

to respond and the criticism that followed of Cambodia and of Rwanda reflect a certain growing sensitivity and awareness of the Holocaust.

Obviously it's not enough to say we're criticizing or we're ashamed that we didn't act is what counts, but I think we're seeing the beginning of such constituencies that are based not on a specific ethnic background but on the sensitivity to the issue and to the moral challenge involved.

I honestly think a big factor here in America particularly is that America, having been sheltered from suffering on its home territory, the Presidents feared this kind of intervention. We know that was a major factor in President Clinton's hesitation, the fear that the public would not stand for casualties.

I think that's changing, just as I believe, unfortunately, partly because Americans now recognize that they are vulnerable and that we're not exempt from these kinds of losses and a recognition that evil not stopped somewhere else can come into your own home territory.

So there is a real human experiential factor that's educating and creating a different kind of constituency. So I don't know. This is an interesting challenge. I see no reason to be cynical about it. Can we ever reach through pure moral teaching or through emotional identification with such suffering and such failure in the Holocaust to create a constituency powerful enough to change policy?

I can't answer the question yet because we haven't done it but I believe such steps already are in the making and that's what you're pointing to.

And so we can't do it alone. Media don't do it alone. There are many factors that play a role but as more policy makers grow up in a world where they do in some sense experience the shame of the past failure or understand the intensity of the failure in the Holocaust all of these factors make future intervention more likely. And I believe in that sense you are not only calling attention to the right tactics but helping us think through what the Committee has to do.

JERRY SHESTACK: Just a brief comment. Santayana once said that those who forget history are doomed to repeat it, and we keep repeating it in Bosnia, Cambodia, Rwanda, and other places. And people do forget and afterwards they see the consequences and perhaps are sorry and then repeat it again. I don't know how we get that kind of constituency. Certainly the increased attention by the media helps it.

One of the reasons President Bush is able to take such strong measures as he is taking right now is because public opinion supports them and if you could muster public opinion on behalf of an intervention or to prevent an incipient genocide leaders do follow what public opinion requires.

How you do that, for one thing the involvement of every citizen in terms of making his views known and letting the support for such matters as intervention being known, those help create a constituency that leaders listen to.

But it is a great mystery why time after time we see a tragic situation like has occurred over in the world since the Holocaust and yet the nations are reluctant to intervene and prevent something which is preventable if they had acted in time.

RABBI GREENBERG: I'm struck by the fact that Cambodia is now trying to create a museum to both educate their future generations and to make the world aware. In Rwanda we had visits from people with the same thing in mind. I think people on the contrary do recognize and believe that this process of arousing consciousness translates into potential support for future action to stop it.

And so in that sense I think you say we're surprised that it happens again and again but, again, the rules are pretty clear again. It happens more likely in weaker countries. That was one of the main lessons people learned from the Holocaust, that potential victims have to become strong enough to protect themselves. This is all part of the ongoing spelling out of this and it is also more likely to happen, as you heard, in an isolated country where there's less attention.

So all of these factors as they become more widely understood I think will operate in our favor, so to speak, in the future.

JERRY FOWLER: You've been very patient.

QUESTION: The ambassador partly anticipated my question. You mentioned the Committee being established in 1995. To what extent did the Rwanda events of 1994 directly contribute to that?

RABBI GREENBERG: I wasn't serving at the time in a leadership role. Maybe I should ask Miles [Lerman] and perhaps Sarah [Bloomfield], although she was not director at the time, was still here. Perhaps they may have some comment.

MILES LERMAN: Well, essentially the creation of the Committee on Conscience was just the fulfillment of a mandate that was given to us. I always compare it to a domestic item. We got the stool with three legs and when we have gotten the mandate to create the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, one of the mandates, one of the legs of these three, was the creation of the Committee on Conscience. Have we been motivated by the Rwanda incident? Perhaps.

But on the other hand I want to point out another thing. In my travels on behalf of the Museum not once in a while but more than once in awhile I'm being asked for god's sake, it's 60 years. The world knows it by now. Why don't you let go? Why are you fanning the flames of hatred?

Now, I am capable of answering why don't you let go but I am not capable of answering people that are listening to us and still say why do you fan the flames of hatred. We recognize that the Holocaust is such an enormous cataclysm that there is no way, there is no formula, how to do good for it. The only thing what we are trying to do, what we have tried to when we started the Museum, is to use these horrible memories, to use these horrible experiences, as a lesson and as a warning to society.

And let me say this to you. I do not believe that the track record of humankind is so excellent that we can leave it to itself. I think we have a job to do. I think that the mere fact that we are sitting here tonight and we have listened to your excellent, excellent presentation of thought, I think this is part of it and this must be part of it.

So to answer your question we do not have an exclusive to suffering. We wish we would get rid of that exclusivity. Historically we didn't do too well on it. Maybe Sarah, who has been with us 12, 13, years, since today, maybe you have another point of view?

SARA BLOOMFIELD: Just something that was actually on Stu's line of thinking as well, which is about all the media exposure that happens. Even in the press even if Rwanda and Cambodia were not on television as much as the others it was not like the Holocaust. It was so widely reported, front-page news, major news.

At the museum, we did an exhibit of Time-Life photographs of the ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and there was a big debate among the staff whether we should have walls or warnings because of the very graphic nature of that imagery. And, of course, we have those walls in the permanent exhibition after a lot of debate.

And we didn't have that warning. It was out, actually, in the tile wall area, where many children go. And we had no comments, none, no complaints. And I wondered if it was that there is so much exposure to this imagery today and if people become complacent and how can we build a constituency if the images become commonplace and if there's also at the same time a sense well, there's these human rights organizations that are handling these things. They're the advocates. And we're really talking about building a different kind of constituency, more of a grass roots constituency that can begin to affect policy in lots of other ways.

I'm not sure there's a question embedded here but it's been something I've been thinking about in terms of Stu's comments and yours.

MR. EIZENSTAT: My question originally was your question relating September 11th and the threat of terrorism but I just wanted to share a real quick comment that I heard from a gentleman in Baltimore who is a survivor of Auschwitz and I've known him for many years. He speaks widely and frequently in Baltimore on his experiences.

And I saw him the Sabbath after September 11th and he said well, we've obviously learned nothing from the Holocaust and what happened is an example. And I'm just sharing his thought and am interested in your reaction in light of comments that were just made.

RABBI GREENBERG: Well, of course, the other thing that you've got to point out is that he said we've learned nothing but we did not hijack planes and smash them into the towers et cetera, et cetera.

They were concrete individuals and those concrete individuals who drove the plan, et cetera. Again, my feeling is that we, and the collective "we" now, have not yet created the combination

of constituency mechanism, sensitivity, that is able to be a worldwide force but that this is now a policy factor I think is self-evident.

And so, again, without sounding complacent my feeling is that the American people are much more sensitized to evil and the need to stop it as well as to the dangers than they were 10, 20, or 30 years ago, and I think at least one of the major contributory factors, and I don't want to say it's the only one, is the growth of consciousness of the Holocaust.

QUESTION: Could I take the liberty of just responding to Mr. Eizenstat's comments and the distinction he proposed between the response to Rwanda and Cambodia and that in Bosnia because the factors which he mentioned, namely television and isolation, seem to me of much lesser relevance than the simple factor of race.

And I think we have to face that. There's a bitter irony in thinking of race, racial distinctions, as being an impediment to the recognition and combating of genocide. But in those cases it seems to me clearly to have been a factor if not the essential or the only one but surely an important one.

JERRY SHESTACK: To the question, have we learned anything from the Holocaust, I think the answer to that is we have learned something. I think this Museum is a good example of it.

Through the people who march through and see our exhibits, through the exhibits that we send around the country, to the literature that we promote, to the studies that you find, Holocaust studies in colleges and universities and schools throughout the country, I think people have learned the capability of evil that is possible in the human condition and the need to war against it.

I think that to a large extent many of the people in our nation are more introspective and more concerned about how could we have a world where a Holocaust could be created. Now, it's not enough and there's always a danger that these lessons can be forgotten as time goes by but I would say that this nation and our leaders have learned something from the Holocaust and that it has had an effect on our policies and on our place in the world.

JERRY FOWLER: Thank you. I just want to respond to Professor Lang and then we'll take two more questions.

RABBI GREENBERG: To that last comment about race as a factor I can't deny that it may well be a factor but, again, I'd like to connect that to a certain aspect of our lessons from the Holocaust, too. It's not easy to kill six million people.

Emotionally and morally a lot of the people who carried it out, after all, had been raised in a culture that said thou shalt not kill, et cetera, so one of the keys to the successful mass murder was to degrade the victims before you killed them.

And, again, there's a demonic, profound genius that runs through the system. You know the obvious cases. The use of numbers rather than names, for example, in Auschwitz. I mean, this

was one of the things that makes possible mass killing of people is you treat them as things to be numbered, not as people who one hesitates to kill.

So there's no question that the lack of equality based on color of skin or on religion or nationality may well predispose people to be more or less likely to try to save somebody. That is something, again, which we all have to wrestle with.

So my point is one learns in the Holocaust that you can't wait till the death before you deal with this issue because it starts with a stereotype or with minor degradation or with dismissal and it turns into a more radical kind of stereotype and then the claim that the Jews are other and the Jews are killers and uncanny. And then the Jews prey on children and are sexual predators and bloodsuckers and so on.

And as each step becomes more drastic the victim is potentially more killable or more degradable. So you're calling our attention to an important point, that racism is not merely a problem of stereotyping and of discrimination, but it also lowers the guard and weakens humanity's will to prevent mass murder.

But I think, again, the lesson is no less. In other words we all have to systematically explore and develop and apply these principles to make people aware of how language, presentation, and hundreds of other ways raise or lower the salience, the dignity, of the other and in turn makes us more likely or less likely to try to save them.

I mean, this is something that every system, I feel, every culture, every language, every religion has to go through now. Is there something in my tradition that puts down or makes less valuable the lives of others? I mean, it's a major crisis, I believe, in all religions.

And I think Islam does have a major problem on its hands because the issue is not just the terrorists. The issue is the extent to which not having gone through this process of exposure to other religions and other people which Christianity and Judaism had to do because of modernity that in it has allowed pockets of this inside/ outside morality to remain strong and it has to be deal with.

But I believe Christianity's act is not yet fully cleaned up on Judaism. Every religion in the world that has to stop and look at its own culture, language, values, and ask do we make white skin more valuable and therefore we're less likely to save black lives or do we make Jewish skin more valuable and are therefore less likely to save nonJewish lives, et cetera.

This is a major challenge and I do believe that confronting the Holocaust and understanding it brings us to a much greater sensitivity to this. Until we do that that's another obstacle to intervention to save lives, and it's a major task ahead of us.

JERRY FOWLER: Yes?

QUESTION: Last question, right?

JERRY FOWLER: Last two questions. Maybe we'll just take both questions and then we'll have the answer.

QUESTION: I wanted to thank you first for the brilliance of your presentation tonight. I was real honored to be exposed to it.

Now, on the US Supreme Court building there are the words "Justice is the Guardian of Liberty." We know in this society if a single life is taken we're indictable for the offense of homicide and subject to be executed depending upon the severity of the crime.

It's certain that in a Holocaust the infamous nature of the event is cataclysmic and yet when we look at the body of international law to in effect bring international justice to bear for the immensity of those crimes there is something lacking. There is the basis for comity, basis for saying not only is one life lost but thousands and millions have been lost.

My question is where are we in the development of the norms and mores of international law to in effect bring the mass murderers of the world to the bar of justice and to prevent these events as time passes?

The Twentieth Century Book of the Dead [indecipherable] is chock-full of too many experiences. Hopefully the 21st Century won't have a similar book but things are not looking too well.

I think we have to look to international jurists to come forth and make the arguments and in effect, as you've argued tonight, make governments, particularly democratic governments, responsible and accountable for international justice just as they are responsible for domestic justice in their own societies.

JERRY FOWLER: Thank you. Why don't we take this last question, and then we'll answer both of them?

QUESTION: Okay, it's not really a question but I wanted to just resonate to your statement that Islam may have a problem. I don't remember if it was exactly Mullah Mohammed Omar but one of the questions that has arisen is the possibility of nuclear weapons, dirty bombs, et cetera. What's going on? Is that really a capability of Al Qaeda?

And the answer was no, we do not have nuclear weapons because if we had them we would have already used them, which I thought is really something about being in love with death in a way.

And I just wanted to finish briefly by saying I remember being at the dedication of this museum and many, many government officials were there, President Clinton, Vice President Gore. Many, many speeches were made about the Holocaust and it was Eli Wiesel who turned to President Clinton and confronted him and said you are the one who can do something about Bosnia and this building is just wood, bricks, et cetera if it isn't going to help you and your government do something about it now.

And I just wanted to finish on that note, that that was the dedication of this very building.

JERRY SHESTACK: Dealing with the matter of international law, if you look at the situation at the time of World War II and the Holocaust there was no international law that protected the individual. The individual counted for nothing. And there was really out of the Nazi experience and the Holocaust that the international law of protection of life and human rights for individuals developed.

The UN Charter had as one of its basic premises the protection of individual life and dignity and the protection of fundamental freedoms. The Genocide Convention in 1948 was the first international convention dealing with the subject of genocide, and then the Universal Declaration of Human Rights dealt with the subjects of life and all other forms of human rights, a kind of bill of rights for the world.

However, they were not implemented and it took a long period before international treaties developed through the 1950s and 1960s covering such matters as torture, racial discrimination, religious intolerance, civil and political rights, economic and social rights.

By now there is a highly developed field of international law but the implementation of it still suffers. There is no international criminal court, for example. In dealing with Rwanda and former Yugoslavia special international criminal courts have been established by the Security Council to deal with war criminals but the definition of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and various other crimes defined in both humanitarian law and other international law is fairly well developed.

So one of the things that emerged out of World War II is now we do have a system of international law to protect the individual. How you implement that is still the challenge for our times.

This is a slow process. The development of international law and its implementation is not a sport for the short-winded and, of course, in 50 years we've made progress, but think back in the United States, for example. The first 50 years after the Bill of Rights we had alien and sedition laws. None of the Bill of Rights applied to the various states. They didn't apply to the states until fairly late into the 20th Century. So progress in the law does not go quickly.

(Interruption of tape)

RABBI GREENBERG: But if after all the suffering there are still Jews left the Jewish people will be held up as an example. In other words presumably they're going to live better or try harder.

Who knows? Maybe our religion will teach the world and all people that goodness. Then she says we can never be just Dutch or just English or whatever; we will always be Jews as well. We'll have to keep on being Jews, but then we'll want to be.

Now, it seems to me that this applies not just to Jews. What she's trying to say is that for anybody who has encountered the intensity of this pain and suffering the human response, and it's almost as much emotional and human as it is thought-through or philosophical, is somehow having seen how life can be made cheap I have this intense need to restore its value and its preciousness. Having seen how weakness can be exploited and cruelly crushed, I have to organize to give strength to potential victims.

And whatever we've done in the past in terms of law, international law or intervention to help others, we have done more in the last few decades but it's such a little bit more, but to me that is the test in that in a sense what we have to do is get more people to understand this experience and to evoke that human response.

And I'm very moved by a lot of people who go through the museum give that response, evoke that very human response of increasing life or increasing responsibility or increasing justice. And I think that is the task the Committee on Conscience, if it does its work right, if we organize right, can make one distinct contribution and that is in the area of genocide, but that will be part of a mosaic, I hope, of a world someday in which people do remember not just the Holocaust but other such experiences and intensify the commitment to life.

JERRY FOWLER: Well, thank you all. I would like to invite all of you to continue this conversation upstairs in the Hall of Witness where we have an informal reception, and thank you all very much for coming.